

January 25, 2013

To: State of Montana Legislative Education Committee
Re: Charter Schools

There needs to be the vehicle in place to address the needs of the youth of this State who do not succeed in the traditional high school.

“The new expectation should fall more in line with wider cultural expectations. Juneau said this week that getting a good job requires a good education, and not just the one offered in the public school system.” (Havre Daily News, January 22, 2013)

Eighteen percent (18%) of Montana youth will not graduate from high school. The dropout rates at some areas of the State are alarmingly high, reaching near 50% at some schools. Nationally, 50% of low-income youth will leave high school. Less than half of those will seek and obtain a diploma or GED after quitting. (YouthBuild USA, 2013) Some aspect or aspects in the traditional high school setting is failing for these students and we, as a country and State, cannot afford to ignore our upcoming labor needs and the status of the upcoming workforce.

As the Director of the YouthBuild of North Central Montana, I can speak for the YouthBuild model as an alternative education which addresses the needs of high-risk youth. YouthBuild is a U.S. Department of Labor grant funded program which recognizes the need to successfully engage youth in academic and vocational education.

“YouthBuild is a community-based alternative education program for youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are high school dropouts, adjudicated youth, youth aging out of foster care, youth with disabilities, and other at-risk youth populations. The YouthBuild program simultaneously addresses several core issues facing low-income communities: affordable housing, education, employment, crime prevention, and leadership development. The YouthBuild model balances in-school learning and occupational skill training that prepare at-risk youth for career placement. The in-school component is an alternative education program that assists youth who are often significantly behind in basic skills to obtain the goal of a high school diploma or GED credential. The occupational skill training component prepares at-risk youth to achieve the goal of career placement...” (From the U.S. Department of Labor, Solicitation for Grant Applications for YouthBuild Grants, January 17, 2013)

As some background on YouthBuild, the Federal YouthBuild program was implemented in 1978 and was originally administered by the office of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Today, the program is administered by the Department of Labor. There are currently 146 YouthBuild programs across the country serving about 10,000 young people. There are two (2) active YouthBuild programs in Montana; one in Havre and the other in Helena. In a national survey of YouthBuild USA affiliates, nearly 100 % of the participants qualify as low income and 94% enter the program without a high school diploma. Seventy-eight percent (78%) will complete the program and of those, 63% will earn a GED or diploma. The outcomes of the already-failed, high-risk population are similar to those of the traditional high school. YouthBuild is succeeding with these youth where the traditional education system has failed.

Each YouthBuild program is similar yet different. We are similar in the criteria for participants, in our content and in our objectives. Yet, the programs are different in the delivery and makeup predicated on the locale and resources. We are all successful in helping the youth who complete the program to achieve their goals to pursue post-secondary education or career and to be active, productive, participants in their communities.

YouthBuild can serve as a model for what can and is happening in innovative education. Not every community needs a YouthBuild. Not every youth needs to be in a YouthBuild program or in an alternative high school setting. But for some youth an alternative to traditional high school and away from traditional high school policy may be their avenue for success. If Charter Schools can provide the opportunity to make a youth successful and wholesomely engaged in his community and a contributing participant in Montana, then it is prudent for this legislature to step forth and make the opportunity a reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Robert Anderson
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